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**EAST–WEST IN MODERN BURYAT POETRY AND PAINTING**

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**Abstract**

The paper is devoted to contemporary Buryat artists – representatives of various arts, whose works provide an insight into the East–West opposition. The authors of this paper focus on the specifics of the relationship between different cultural codes, eastern and western, through the works of Buryat poetry and painting. The study aims to identify similarities and differences in the approach of artists of different generations – Bair Dugarov, a poet born in 1947, and Zorikto Dorzhiev, a painter and sculptor born in 1976 – to the synthesis of different cultures, their own, national, and Western, European. It is shown that this synthesis helped each of the artists express their creative personality in the most complete and original way. The study analyzes the spatial organization of the Great Steppe, which brings together Dugarov’s poems and Dorzhiev’s picturesque paintings. Dugarov’s poetry reflects the music of the verse that combines the memory of the lyrical hero inherited from steppe ancestors and the nostalgia of a modern poet for the lost beauty. Despite generational differences, a 'literary' style of paintings and picturesque words, the originality of lyricism and irony underlie the relationship between Dugarov’s poetry and Dorzhiev’s painting. It is concluded that the dialogue between Eastern and Western traditions gives rise to the image of the Artist, who denies the existence of time, space and national boundaries, and freely moves in the space with its complex internal organization.

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## 1. Introduction

A burning interest of Russian artists in the East–West opposition can be explained by the inevitable impact of various cultural traditions on their work. In Buryat art, this interest is supported by peculiarities of the Buryat culture, such features of the national mentality as openness to other peoples and cultures, readiness for mutual understanding, and tolerance (Serebryakova, 2009). When speaking about the phenomenon of a transcultural Buryat writer, researchers noted one of the reasons for a steady trend towards the synthesis of the traditions of European and Eastern cultures – the historical and geographical position of Buryatia as a 'crossroads of cultures' (Naidakov, 1997). Due to this, the East–West opposition appears to be essentially mental in Buryat art.

The poet Bair Dugarov and the painter Zorikto Dorzhiev, two Buryat artists, representatives of two generations, 'fathers' and 'children', were chosen for this study not only due to their significant role for the national culture and its modern existence. Then, important for the authors is their inherent awareness of themselves as carriers of two cultures, two mentalities – 'national', Eastern, and 'alien', Western. Considering the fundamental difference between the two parts of the opposition in their works, we can see the affinity of the two artists in the depiction of their national space and the difference in their approach to the Western civilization as the space of History.

## 2. Problem Statement

The spatial organization in poetry and painting is different, but the interaction of different cultural codes of the East and the West serves as the common content of the work for two Buryat artists, who are equally engaged in the search for the traditional national identity. At the same time, belonging to different generations makes it possible to problematize different approaches to the relationship between Eastern and Western mentality in one national culture. The internal dynamics of the relationship between the national and Western culture in modern Buryat art is a historical and theoretical problem, and solution to this problem is probably affected by the difference in both aesthetic discourse (verbal and visual) and generational factors.

## 3. Research Questions

Dugarov (2013), the national poet of Buryatia, twice laureate of the State Prize of the Republic of Buryatia, steadily appeals to the East–West opposition. Being a historian by education, Doctor of Philology, he in his poetry focuses on the search for national self-identity and openness to the world Western culture. In the poetic concept of his books, the music of the verse was always heard to combine the sounds of the 'hair string' of the Buryat-Mongolian morin-khuur and the sound of a European violin. The poet even gave an aphoristic definition of his poetry: *Apollo's lyre sounds like a morin-khuur string*. This figurative meaning suggests a synthesis of the Eastern and Western consciousness but not opposition. Thus, the steppe images of a nomadic rider and his horse-pacer are inseparable from the lyrical consciousness of a modern poet, who often feels like a 'rider on foot' who walked along the paths of Mongolian horses while studying ancient history, while *Leaving Pegasus / To graze on a fresh lawn*

(Dugarov, 2017). In the poems of all his collections and cycles, the appearance of a lyric hero reflects the complexity of the inner world, trying to unite the East and the West into a harmonious unity.

However, this complexity is deeply dramatic, for example, the image of a horse reflects the spatial/temporal characteristic of the lyric hero, who travels through a historical break with his horse. Once *The horse saved heroes and maidens from oblivion, / The horse read the inner thoughts of kings and prophets*, and now *The horse hobbled by the century grazes in the shadow of the highway* (Horse). This sad change is softened only by the morin-khuur inherited from ancestors, which is 'crowned with the image of a horse' on the neck (in Buryat, *morin* is a horse, *khuur* is a bowed musical instrument of the Mongolian people) (Dugarov, 2017). In the poem *Horse on the Pavement*, there is no hope in the symbolic image of a horse being urged on by an old rider, which, as it seems to the hero, *Only trotted, / Then it moves slower, / Quieter, / As if it was leaving without haste / To pass into History* (Dugarov, 2017). This situation can be observed in other poems, where an urban dweller regrets the oblivion of 'freedom and space' associated with civilization approaching the steppe space.

The space of Dugarov's poetry is the Great Steppe inherited from ancestors, which is adjacent to the modern, urban space. Thus, the book of poems *Asian Gait* shows the world of the nomads of Siberia and Central Asia, a space inhabited by warriors and riders, and filled with the music of the steppe with its yurts and singing larks. This space is imprinted in the memory and consciousness of the lyrical hero galloping in the 'clothes' of a medieval nomad and at the same time traveling through Western cities. This is a generalized image of a medieval rider and a modern poet, who inherited Temujin's genes and is attracted by the poetry of *The Secret Legend of the Mongols: Steep waves of life / Swept away the trail of a Mongol horse from the earth. / But the spirit of ancestors was raised to the universe. / The Steppe did that at its finest hour. / And its song of a secret legend / Through time echoed in me* (At the end of the millennium) (Dugarov, 2013). This is one of Dugarov's program statements about personal involvement in national traditions and covenants. The key words of the poet declare the values of his poetic world. Such values as the folk song, the native steppe, the faithful horse are dominated by the music of the steppe and horse racing. The steppe rejoices over the overflow of monotonous songs and 'the crescents of horseshoes.' The lyrical hero is a modern urban dweller yearning for values forgotten in the city noise, but he is still a poet, who is aware of uliger legends, a narrator-uligershin, who thinks and creates the traditional anaphoric verse with rhyme at the beginning of the lines: *The era of powerful legends, why is it disturbing my song? / I feel the echo of the steppe anaphores with my breath* (Dugarov, 2013).

The world of the Great Steppe in Dugarov's poetry is both archaic and historical since one of the best qualities of his poetry is the extraordinary unity of the moment, history and eternity. Space-time in his poems invariably brings together epochs and continents, times and countries. The way it happens can be seen, for example, in the poem *From the Horde to Ordynka*. The conversation of the lyrical hero with a Moscow archaeologist, a specialist in the Golden Horde, which takes place in a street cafe, 'bears the history of centuries', and this suddenly turns into an active work of imagination. The ancestral genealogy helps the hero see himself as an Asian, an interlocutor, and an inhabitant of the Kipchak steppe, through the thickness of centuries, and then the images will come to life: *Our horses and steppes fraternized with each other in space <...> The days of sunset swirled like dust from under horse hooves ...* (Dugarov, 2017). The clarity and harmony in the soul of the lyrical hero do not contradict the note of bitterness and

nostalgia for the past and coexists with an ambivalent attitude to history and modernity owing to the suppressed East–West antinomy. Thus, a poem from the book *Sutra of Moments* suggests the idea of the inseparable unity of the past and the present – it is about the contribution of the Great Steppe to the dialogue that exists in the consciousness of a contemporary lyric hero and in the dream of the Hunnic Shanyu, who heard the call of the future in the mighty thunder of the Chinggis cavalry: *All this will happen violently. / One day the steppe will revolt. / And the first Eurasia will be born, / binding the West and the East with stirrups ...* (Dugarov, 2011). One of the authors of this paper reported in detail about the poet's Eurasianism (Imikhelova, 2020).

The language of harmony with the world brings Dugarov closer to the Tibetan hermit poet Milaraiba and the Japanese poet Basho (Poets). In addition to the oriental poets, the poet Tyutchev is in the consciousness of the lyrical hero, and the Buryat poet feels a spiritual affinity with Tyutchev. The conciliation of modernity and eternity, the merging of the space of the Buryat steppe and the lights of skyscrapers occurs due to the power of poetic memory and imagination, an original understanding of the synthesis of the East and the West, which acts as a dialogue of interaction and interpenetration of two cultures – the ancient Steppe and modern civilization.

Dugarov's poetry is comparable to the works of artists of his generation: Alla Tsybikova, Balzhinima Dorzhieva, Alexandra Dugarova. However, it is much more interesting and representative to compare his poetry with the work of Zorikto Dorzhiev. This can be evidenced by comparing the spatial component of their work – the theme of the Great Steppe covered by Z. Dorzhiev in painting. He has got an academic education at Krasnoyarsk Academy of Arts (similar to his senior colleague, the famous sculptor Dashi Namdakov) and is one of the leading painters of a new generation of artists whose works belong entirely to the 21st century. At the beginning of this century, his exhibitions were held in Moscow and St. Petersburg, in Japan and the USA, in France and Venice.

At the very beginning of his work, his nomads, riders, and hunters live in a special dimension and space. Similar to the poet Dugarov, this place is the Great Steppe. However, it has no connection with the present day of the author. This is a kind of antiquity, the time of the Asian archaic. Themes, plots, and images reveal ahistorical existence of the Buryat ethnos. In the focus of his picturesque paintings of nomads, the Nomad in general. Sometimes he is a warrior (Troops), and sometimes he is a hunter going hawking (Hunter), or a medieval rider delivering mail (Postman). The world is inhabited by women – brides, princesses, concubines of the khan. The search for a bride is the concern of this conventionally symbolic Nomad. For example, the painting *Abduction* depicts a faithful horse waiting for the rider, who is already rushing with the prey over his shoulder. He performs a kind of ritual, and the girl does not object, which means routine in this world.

Dorzhiev's painting is very detailed, the vestments and armor of the riders-warriors are clearly depicted. A spectator cannot see faces in the modern sense, he sees archaic masks instead, where the eyes are not highlighted, there are only slits, and ears are in their places – that is the mask. Thus, this is not a specific man, he is a representative of the clan-tribe, a medieval person in general. The variety of masks is great, as well as images of a horse, brides, and children playing ancient games. This Steppe Universe will then always be felt in his painting.

Since the 2010s, his picturesque portraits show the features of specific people, a conventional person gives way to a historical person, that is a contemporary (The Shore). And his face is tense, nervous, anxious and alarmed. There is much in common with the anxiety and drama of Dugarov's lyric hero. And thus the refined figures of European painting, personal feelings and experiences of the heroes appear in his works. Instead of a mythological portrait of an oriental beauty (Dangin), a portrait of Girl with a Coral Earring appears, echoing the famous painting by the Dutch artist J. Vermeer, where a young beautiful creature is thinking about her own, personal, but not about belonging to the master, to another world, or to the clan-tribe. Personal life of his steppe Gioconda Khatun (mistress) is reflected in a lyrical landscape with its misty haze (Yakimovich, 2015). These experimental paintings exhibit the inner drama of a new hero.

Historical reality bursts into Dorzhiev's picture of the world, where the union of the Oriental and the Western is evident (The Chronicler). It is mainly a reality where antiquity and modernity coexist. For example, his painting The Princess introduces the plot of Andersen's European fairy tale in an ironical way: a girl sleeps on more than 10–12 thick and thin featherbeds, blankets, and this is a modern girl with an athletic body who lives not in a yurt, but in a modern city. This is evidenced by shoes removed from their feet, ironically stylized as old fairy tale shoes with bent toes, and sports knee-highs can be seen between the mattresses. The Artist, where a young man in a national dressing gown, belted with a sash, stands in front of a bare street wall and holds a spray bottle with paint in his hands, and a scarf covers his mouth and nose to protect against the poisonous smell. He looks directly at the viewer, and his eyes are no longer slits, they are wide, and the Asian cut does not interfere with considering the appearance of a new personality, almost from the future, and it is unknown who it will turn into.

The paintings of the new, mature Dorzhiev are inhabited by men, women, children, who have something of a conventional character, of a person in general, but there is much of a different, modern world. And steppe riders are already filled with the feeling of a new era – computer, digital. For example, paint drips from the croup and hooves of horses, and Western characters of the modern era appear against the background and even in robes. The historical rift indicates a dialogue between the East and the West, there is no drama of the poet Dugarov, but there is a light, even cheerful irony. The spirit of modern European culture is imposed, but there is a lot of indirect influence with a touch of irony (Girl with Peaches, Assol, Stranger).

All these changes in the artist's picture of the world speak of the controversy with himself early and the struggle against past aspirations, similar to Pasternak: *With whom did his struggles proceed? / With himself, with himself*. And the boundaries between these worlds, old, archaic and new, modern, are polemically open and mobile similar to the boundaries between creative stages. The pathos of the whole world of B. Dugarov is broken and drown in irony. This is because the art of Z. Dorzhiev is in motion and in the struggle against the opposites inherent in it. Both the drama of the Dugarov's lyric hero and the lyrical contact of Dorzhiev's hero with reality are phenomena of the same order. The movement indicates the involvement of representatives of local people in the historical process, in the process of uniting Western and non-Western influences.

The loyalty to everything national and dependence on other sources of creativity are common for the two artists. Their steppe images are notable for a demonstrative return to archaic, exotic authenticity

as a kind of opposition to Western-centrism and Western thinking, which is characteristic of a negative model of reality and postcolonial perception of the world in post-Soviet art (Tolstanova, 2012). Nevertheless, Dorzhiev's 'literary' image and Dugarov's figurativeness of the word show not only different types of art. Paintings that depict the 'life of the people', lyrically disturbing in Dugarov and epic calm in Dorzhiev, are filled with features of national identity, which inherits a lot of Western identity of artists who have mastered the school of European art. Therefore, Dugarov is open to the perception of other cultures as an artist who has paid tribute to the events and trends of the West (for example, the vers libre Manhattan). Dorzhiev exhibits a different range of western space, which is not always serious, very playful, conventional, aesthetic (for example, Danae). However, each of the artists clearly shows a dialogue, the openness of the artist's position, who maintains or strives for inner harmony, including harmony between 'national' and 'alien'.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The study aims to determine the dynamics of creativity of Buryat artists in depicting the East–West opposition and to clarify the features of the historical existence of a modern national artist at the interface of cultural traditions.

#### **5. Research Methods**

Comparative analysis and hermeneutic interpretation of poetic and pictorial works.

#### **6. Findings**

The internal development of the artistic worlds of two contemporary Buryat artists – the poet B. Dugarov and the painter Z. Dorzhiev – can be compared through their constant appeal to the East–West theme. Despite the difference between the two types of art and the belonging of the artists to different generations, a general tendency can be observed towards a dialogue between 'national', the Eastern, and 'alien', the Western, within a single spatial organization. The combination of the appearance of the medieval Great Steppe with the images of modern reality indicates that the Buryat-Mongolian ethnos and its culture currently exist in the space of History, in a dialogue between the past and the present, momentary and eternal. And the dialogue between 'national' and 'alien' as 'national' is embedded in Buryat art in different ways: it can be serious, take place directly, but it can also be mediated, ironic; however, in both cases these are examples of an original dialogue between the East and the West.

#### **7. Conclusion**

The works of Buryat artists focused on a dialogue between the East and the West represent the national on the basis of the mentality of a new, universal artist's personality, which creates in the context of expanding consciousness of a new civilization. The image of an artist created by B. Dugarov and Z. Dorzhiev freely exists in the space with no temporal, spatial, national boundaries and leads to

understanding of the mental foundations of national culture open to a different aesthetic tradition. The study of different cultural codes in the works of a poet and a painter necessitates the awareness of the dynamics of changes in the internal aesthetic attitudes of a modern artist in the polyphonic and multicultural space of the globalizing world.

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